



FFI-027-2002

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March 4, 2002  
1420 East 6th Ave.  
P.O. Box 200701  
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council  
Montana Department of Environmental Quality  
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
Fisheries Division  
Endangered Species Coordinator  
Nongame Coordinator  
Native Species Coordinator, Fisheries Office  
Bozeman Office

Montana State Library, Helena  
MT Environmental Information Center  
Montana Audubon Council  
Ruby Valley Conservation District, P.O. Box 295, Sheridan, MT 59743  
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena  
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena  
Lewis and Clark Chapter Trout Unlimited, P.O. Box 475, Twin Bridges, MT 59754  
Bureau of Land Management, Dillon Office, 1005 Selway Drive, Dillon, MT 59725  
Malesich Ranch Company, 9575 Highway 41, Dillon, MT 59725  
Beaverhead Watershed Committee, P.O. Box 504, Twin Bridges, MT 59754

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment prepared for a Future Fisheries Project tentatively planned to restore habitat for a westslope cutthroat trout population within a two-mile reach of Stone Creek, a tributary to the Beaverhead River. This proposed project is located on property owned by the Bureau of Land Management and the Malesich Ranch Company approximately 10 miles northeast of the town of Dillon in Madison County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5 P.M., April 4, 2002 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. Completion of this project is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432. Please note that this draft EA will be considered as final if no substantive comments are received by the deadline listed above.

Sincerely,

Mark Lere, Program Officer  
Habitat Protection Bureau  
Fisheries Division  
e-mail: mlere@state.mt.us

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
Fisheries Division  
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
Stone Creek Channel Restoration Project

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-272 through 273 that directs the Department to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The program involves physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in rivers and lakes for the purposes of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. Additionally, the 1999 Montana Legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. The program calls for the enhancement of bull trout and cutthroat trout through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the Future Fisheries Program. This project is being proposed to restore habitat for a native westslope cutthroat trout population in an approximately 2-mile reach of Stone Creek, a tributary to the Beaverhead River. This project would be a continuation of a very successful restoration project conducted on an upstream reach of the stream completed in 1998. The project site is located on property owned by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and by the Malesich Ranch Company approximately 10 miles northeast of the town of Dillon in Madison County (Attachment 1).

- I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on Stone Creek, a tributary to the Beaverhead River, located approximately 10 miles northeast of the town of Dillon within Township 7 South, Range 6 West, Sections 17, 18, 20, 21 in Madison County. The proposed project would commence at the confluence of the West and Middle forks of Stone Creek and continue downstream to the confluence with Crittendon Creek.
- II. Need for the Project: One goal within Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) six-year operations plan for the fisheries program is to "restore and enhance degraded habitats" by implementing habitat restoration projects and administering the Future Fisheries Improvement Program to restore important habitats on public and private lands. This proposed project would help meet this goal.

Stone Creek has been degraded primarily by the location and past maintenance practices on an ore-hauling road that parallels the stream. Road grading practices have resulted in the continued widening and lowering of the roadbed that have contributed substantial sediment into the stream and have led to poor bank conditions along much of the stream length. Sediment loading has resulted in a lack of pools, creating overall poor fish habitat. Stone Creek supports a native population of genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout. Westslope cutthroat trout are considered a species of special concern in Montana due to their declining numbers and diminishing habitat. Barretts Minerals will commence a road restoration and repair effort in the spring, 2002 that will significantly reduce sediment loading into Stone Creek. This project proposes to restore pool quality and stabilize eroding banks at individually identified sites within a two-mile reach of the stream. The project is intended to compliment a previous restoration project that was

successfully completed on an upstream reach of the creek in 1998.

### III. Scope of the Project:

The proposal calls for restoring natural channel function and improving westslope cutthroat habitat by reconfiguring channel dimensions, installing grade control, constructing pools and installing large woody debris. Sloughing stream banks would be stabilized by sloping them to a stable angle of repose and by re-vegetation efforts. If deemed necessary, the project might also include improvements to fish passage at an existing culvert. Pools would be excavated to a proper dimension and would be maintained by installing directional rock shears at the head of each pool. Restoration efforts would focus on techniques used to restore Rosgen A and B channel types to a proper function. Re-vegetation efforts would involve the placement of salvaged sod and sedge mats and the installation of native willow clumps along the stream margin. Disturbed areas also would be re-vegetated with a mix of native grass seed. Restoration work would be applied to discreet sites within a 2-mile reach of Stone Creek as identified by a selected consultant in conjunction with FWP and BLM fisheries biologists and a BLM hydrologist. The proposed project would mimic the type of work completed in 1998. This project is expected to cost \$40,000.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$18,000.00.

### IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

### V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

#### 1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Restoring the natural function of the existing channel is expected to create a healthier habitat for aquatic life by reducing sediment input, creating pools and providing overhead cover. Expected improvements in the aquatic habitat should enhance the native westslope cutthroat trout population found in the stream. Habitat for riparian dependent wildlife would also be improved by enhancing the riparian vegetative community through the planting of willow along the stream margin. Project benefits would be additive to those generated through a previously completed restoration project located on an upstream reach of the creek.

#### 2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short-term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, construction will occur during a low flow period and operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. The Department of Environmental Quality will be contacted to determine narrative conditions to meet short-term water quality standards and protect aquatic biota. A 310 permit (Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act) will be obtained from the local Conservation District and the

U.S. Army Corp of Engineers will be contacted for requirements to meet the federal Clean Water Act (404 permit). In the long term, restoring the natural function of the existing channel and completing the proposed road repair would reduce the contribution of fine sediment to downstream areas, thereby improving the overall quality of downstream waters.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the stream margin would be disturbed by project construction, but would recover quickly following proposed re-vegetation efforts. Overall, the project is expected to reduce bank erosion and improve channel stability.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation and cover would be disturbed during the period of construction. However, proposed re-vegetation efforts would act to mitigate these disturbances.

5. Aesthetics.

Aesthetics would be adversely impacted during project construction due to ground disturbance and the presence of heavy equipment. In the long term, aesthetics would be enhanced by restoring a two-mile reach of stream to a healthier and more natural stream environment. Aesthetics would be further enhanced by restoring the woody vegetation component within the riparian corridor.

7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources.

Stone Creek supports a population of genetically pure, native westslope cutthroat trout, a species of special concern in Montana. This project is intended to improve habitat for westslope cutthroat trout by enhancing pool habitat and increasing overhead cover. A similar project completed in 1998 on an upstream reach of Stone Creek successfully increased the standing crop of westslope cutthroat trout nearly 15 fold in comparison to pre-reclamation estimates.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

The proposed project will likely require an individual Army Corp of Engineers 404 permit. Therefore, the State Historic Preservation Office will be contacted to determine the need for compliance with the federal historic preservation regulations. The project will not begin until a cultural clearance is granted.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

7. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

It is anticipated that the proposed restoration efforts within a 2-mile reach of Stone Creek would enhance the population of westslope cutthroat trout residing in the stream. Consequently, the recreational fishery in Stone Creek is expected to improve. Presently, state fishing regulations allow for the catch and release of westslope cutthroat trout in Stone Creek and the stream is accessible to anglers.

13. Locally adopted environmental plans and goals.

This proposed project is supported by the Beaverhead Watershed Committee. This watershed committee is contributing funds towards completion of the project. Stone Creek is currently on the 303(d) list and efforts to improve water quality will move the stream closer to an unimpaired status.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, this segment of Stone Creek will continue to have a poor pool frequency and an overall simplified aquatic habitat. Habitat for westslope cutthroat trout will remain marginal and, as a result, the population density will remain reduced. The natural function of the stream channel will remain degraded and bedload transport will remain impaired.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to improve habitat for a genetically pure population of westslope cutthroat trout by adjusting channel morphology, stabilizing eroding stream banks, constructing pools and enhancing the riparian vegetative community by transplanting sods and willow clumps. These activities would provide for greater channel diversity and stability and would reduce sediment loading, resulting in a healthier habitat for aquatic life. This alternative would improve aquatic habitat and water quality within the project area and would be expected to increase the population of westslope cutthroat within this 2-mile reach of Stone Creek.

VIII. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section

1. Is an EIS required? No.

We conclude from this review that the proposed activities will have a positive impact on the physical and human environment.

2. Level of public involvement.

The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The proposed project also will be

reviewed by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission and will be contingent upon their approval. The Environmental Assessment (EA) is being distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter. The EA will be published on Montana Fish, Wildlife and Park's web page: [fwp.state.mt.us](http://fwp.state.mt.us).

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5 P.M. on April 4, 2002.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer  
Habitat Protection Bureau  
Fisheries Division  
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
P.O. Box 200701  
Helena, MT 59620

Telephone: (406) 444-2432  
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MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS  
1420 E 6th Ave, PO BOX 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701  
(406) 444-2535

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title: Stone Creek Channel Restoration Project

Division/Bureau: Fisheries Division -Future Fisheries Improvement  
Description of Project The project is being proposed to restore habitat for a native westslope cutthroat trout population within an approximately two-mile reach of Stone Creek, a tributary to the Beaverhead River. This proposed project would be a continuation of a very successful restoration project completed on an upstream reach of Stone Creek in 1998. The project site is located on property owned by the BLM and the Malesich Ranch Company approximately 10 miles northeast of the town of Dillon in Madison County.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Terrestrial & aquatic life and habitats			X			X
2. Water quality, quantity & distribution			X			X
3. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture			X			X
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality			X			X
5. Aesthetics			X			X
6. Air quality				X		
7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources			X			X
8. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		X

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Social structures & mores				X		
2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity				X		
3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural or industrial production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational and wilderness activities			X			X
8. Quantity & distribution of employment				X		
9. Distribution & density of population & housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial & commercial activity				X		
12. Demands for energy				X		
13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals			X			X
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows				X		

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction Ruby Valley Conservation District, BLM - Dillon Office, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corp of Engineers, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office  
 Individuals or groups contributing to this EA Ruby Valley Conservation District; Dick



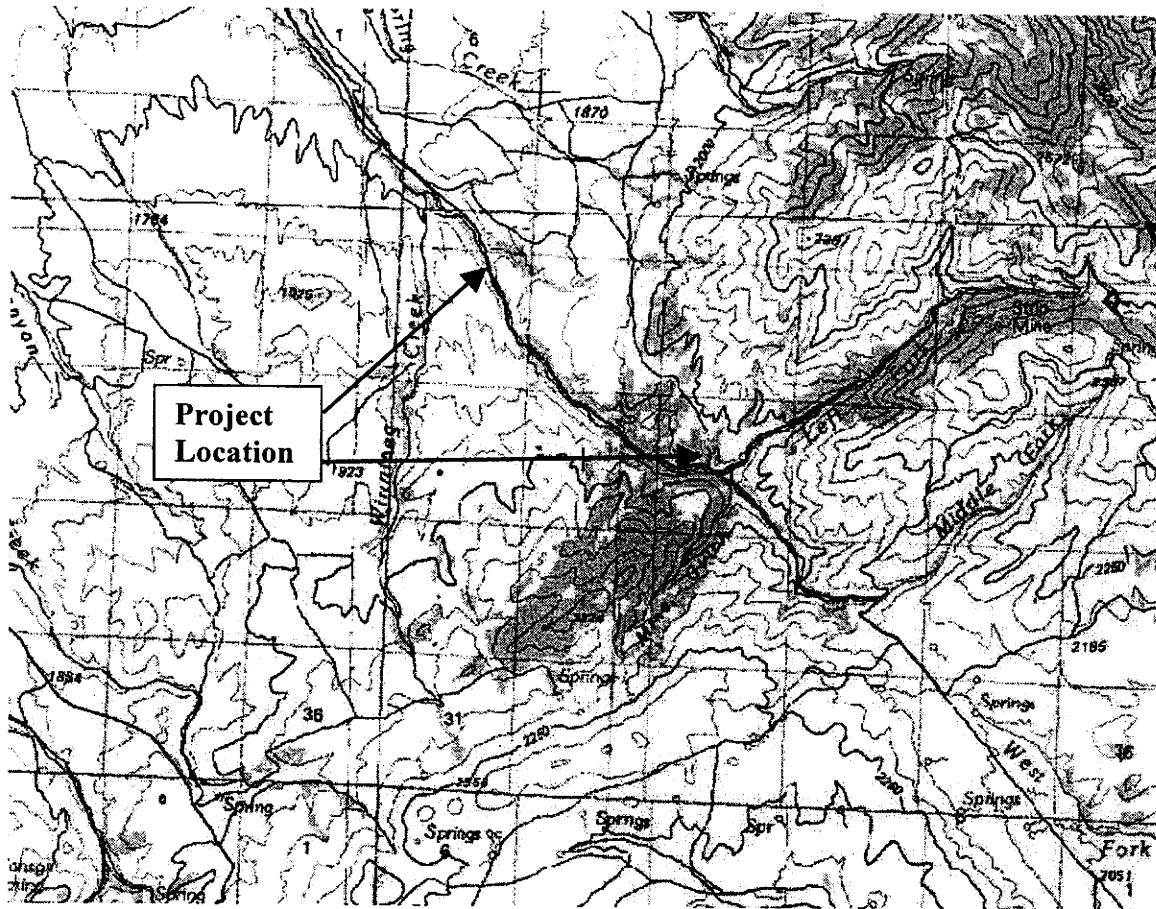
Oswald, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by: Mark Lere

Date: March 4, 2002

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Attachment 1. Map showing location of a proposed Future Fisheries Improvement Project on Stone Creek, a tributary to the Beaverhead River.